



Making a Difference in a Child's Life

Each year in Virginia, over 39,000 children are reported to local social services departments for suspected child abuse or neglect. Many of these children attend public and private schools.

Abuse and neglect of children occurs within families and in other settings where children are provided care or services. These settings include schools, residential facilities, day care centers/homes, and recreational or sporting programs.

As a school employee who has daily contact with students, you are in a key position to recognize indicators of child maltreatment and request help and services for the child and his/her family.



What is Child Abuse and Neglect?

Section 63.2-100 of the Code of Virginia defines an abused or neglected child as any child under 18 years of age whose parent, guardian, or other person responsible for the child's care:

- 1) Causes or threatens to cause a nonaccidental physical or mental injury.
- 2) Causes or threatens to cause a nonaccidental physical or mental injury during the manufacture or sale of certain drugs.
- 3) Neglects or refuses to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, emotional nurturing, or health care.
- 4) Abandons the child.



- 5) Fails to provide adequate supervision in relation to the child's age and level of development.
- 6) Commits or allows to be committed any illegal sexual act upon a child including incest, rape, fondling, indecent exposure, prostitution, or allows a child to be used in any sexually explicit visual material.
- 7) Knowingly leaves a child alone in the same dwelling with a person who is not related to the child by blood or marriage and who is required to register as a violent sexual offender.

In addition, the law requires physicians to report to CPS any newborn infant who tests positive for drugs.

Required Reporting

Section 63.2-1509A of the Code of Virginia **requires teachers or other persons employed in a public or private school, kindergarten, or nursery school**, when acting in their professional roles, to immediately report suspicions of child abuse or neglect that may have occurred both *within* and *outside* of the school setting.

Reports can be made by calling your local social services department or the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline at 1-800-552-7096.

In lieu of a report to the local social services department or the Hotline, Section 63.2-1509A of the Code permits school employees to immediately notify the person in charge or his/her designee who "shall make a report forthwith."

Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect		
Physical Abuse	Physical Indicators <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unexplained bruises on face, torso, back, buttocks, thighs• Multiple injuries in various stages of healing• Bruises/welts resembling instrument used e.g. belt, cord• Human bite marks• Injuries regularly appearing after absence, weekend, etc.• Unexplained fractures, lacerations, abrasions	Behavioral Indicators <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reports injury by caretaker• Uncomfortable with physical contact• Complains of soreness or moves uncomfortably• Wears clothing inappropriate to weather (to cover body)• Afraid to go home• Chronic runaway (adolescents)• Behavior extremes (withdrawn, aggressive)• Apprehensive when other children cry
Physical Neglect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consistent hunger, poor hygiene• Unattended physical problems or medical needs• Consistent lack of supervision• Abandonment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reports no caretaker at home• Begs, steals food• Frequently absent or tardy• Constant fatigue, listlessness, or falling asleep in class• Extended stays at school (early arrival and late departure)• Shunned by peers
Sexual Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sexually transmitted disease (pre-teens)• Pregnancy• Difficulty walking or sitting• Pain or itching in genital area• Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing• Bruises/bleeding in external genitalia	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reports sexual abuse• Highly sexualized play• Detailed, age inappropriate understanding of sexual behavior• Role reversal, overly concerned for siblings• Chronic runaway• Excessive seductiveness• Suicide attempts (adolescents)• Deterioration in academic performance• Sudden, noticeable behavior changes
Emotional Maltreatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May have frequent stomach aches, head aches or unexplained weight fluctuations• May have speech disorders• May lag in physical development• May have a non-organic, failure-to-thrive medical diagnosis• May have learning problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exhibits age inappropriate behaviors such as thumb sucking, biting, head banging or rocking• Exhibits extreme behaviors such as over compliance, passivity, aggression, or withdrawal• Exhibits emotional or intellectual developmental delays• Exhibits cruel behavior or may seem to get pleasure from hurting others and/or animals• May abuse alcohol or drugs• May have eating disorders

A combination or pattern of indicators should alert you to the possibility of maltreatment. Indicators should be considered together with the explanation provided, the child's developmental and physical capabilities, and behavior changes.





Additional Information

For additional information, prevention materials, and/or in-service training, contact your local social services department or the Virginia Department of Social Services at www.dss.state.va.us.



Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-552-7096

(Language Line available)

Virginia Department of Social Services
801 East Main Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219
www.dss.virginia.gov

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School employees reporting in good faith are immune from civil and criminal liability pursuant to Section 63.2-1512 of the *Code*.

Talking with the Child

When it is necessary to talk with a child in response to a disclosure of maltreatment or to clarify suspicions, it is important to remember to handle the discussion with sensitivity. Your response has the power to calm or upset the child.

Do:

- ▶ Find a private place to talk
- ▶ Reassure the child that he/she is not in trouble
- ▶ Keep your own feelings under control
- ▶ Listen
- ▶ Use open ended questions, "can you tell me what happened?"
- ▶ Use the child's vocabulary
- ▶ Let the child know what you will do
- ▶ Support the child

Do Not:

- ▶ Press for details beyond what the child is willing to share (*You do not need to prove abuse or neglect*)
- ▶ Promise confidentiality
- ▶ Ask leading or suggestive questions
- ▶ Make angry or critical comments about the alleged perpetrator
- ▶ Disclose information indiscriminately, keeping in mind the child's right to privacy



Local Department of Social Services Response

After a report is made, a child protective services (CPS) social worker will interview the child and siblings. The interview may occur at school. Parental consent to interview at school is not necessary pursuant to Section 63.2-1518 of the *Code of Virginia*.

The CPS social worker will also interview the parents or caretakers, the alleged perpetrator, and other persons having information about suspected abuse or neglect.

The CPS social worker will conduct a child safety assessment; determine if child abuse or neglect occurred or if there is risk of harm; and develop a safety and services plan with the family when indicated.

The primary goal of child protective services is to strengthen and support families in preventing the (re)occurrence of child maltreatment through community-based services.



Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect in Virginia

A Guide for School Employees